

## Acknowledging excellence and looking towards the future

April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2008 was a day for both congratulations and consideration at the National Press Club in Canberra. Ten researchers won *Citation Awards* from Thompson Scientific for papers they had published between 1997 and 2007. Awards were based on the average citation rate per paper as a measure of excellence. The aim was to reward researchers who were making substantial, long-term contributions to their field.

Name	Institution	Field	Cites	Papers	Cites/ paper
Prof Anthony Jorm	Oxygen Research Centre, University of Melbourne	Psychiatry	1857	111	16.73
Prof Brian Schmidt	ANU	Astronomy & Astrophysics	4853	11	441.18
Professor Don Harding	La Trobe University	Economics	64	5	12.8
Dr Ian Wright	Macquarie University	Ecology	566	5	113.2
Professor Paul Chandler	University of Wollongong	Education	249	9	27.67
Dr Stuart Batten	Monash University	Chemistry	4479	101	44.35
Professor Suzanne Corey	Walter & Eliza Institute of Medical Research	Biochemistry & Molecular Biology	4175	9	463.89
Professor Terence Hughes	James Cook University	Marine & Freshwater Biology	2529	43	58.81
Dr William James Peacock	CSIRO	Plant Sciences	1347	12	112.25
Professor Zheng-Xiang Li	Curtin University of Technology	Geosciences	591	7	84.43

### ERA – *Excellence in Research for Australia* initiative

Professor Margaret Shiel, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Research Council (ARC) gave an overview of some of the factors that would be considered in the new system. Her key points were that the new system would be simpler and more inclusive than the deposed RQF and that steps would be taken to ensure that the new evaluation system did not have undesirable consequences.

In his response on behalf of FASTS (Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies), Professor Ken Baldwin suggested that ERA should cover all

those different types of achievements that would stimulate a researcher to “walk down the corridor to congratulate a peer”. He suggested that this might include:

- Publishing in a top journal in the field
- Being appointed as an Editor of a major publication
- Being invited to speak by a Learned Society
- Receiving a special award by a Learned Society or Organization
- Being invited to give a Plenary talk at a conference
- Being highly cited
- Receiving considerable media coverage (following peer review)

Other lesser but still important contributions might include the following but sometimes the researcher might commiserate rather than congratulate because of the perceived work involved:

- Chair and coordinate a session at a major conference
- Be asked to sit on the program committee of a major conference

Professor Stuart Cunningham responded on behalf of CHASS (Council of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences). He agreed with Baldwin that the idea of *offering congratulations* captured the essence of how we perceive excellence. His plea was that the measure should be holistic and take account of the accumulation of achievements. He also stressed that books, book chapters and conference papers be added into assessment tools as these were critical factors, not only in the Social Sciences, but also in Maths, Engineering and IT. “The Social Sciences are ready to go with ERA but Creative Arts are not yet ready”. Regardless of field, new evaluations also need to be able to capture progress rather than be totally retrospective so as to assess the capacity to sustain emerging areas.

Some critical points were raised by the audience:

- Are we able to develop a way of assessing student quality?
- How can we capture interdisciplinary efforts effectively?
- Public comment is important – how can we work with the media most effectively to show the public that research is relevant?

### ***Understanding and supporting Innovation***

Professor Alan Robson, Vice Chancellor of the University of Western Australia gave the keynote *Press Club* lunchtime address. Wisely he reminded us that Innovation is diverse and crosses national boundaries. It is generally a process of incremental change that leads to improved delivery of services and in the long-term, the ability to deal with key issues like climate change and population health. We have tended to limit the notion of innovation to dollars, commercialization of research and protection of Intellectual Property rather than recognizing that most innovation is gradual and occurs in small and medium sized businesses (SME) as part of normal business.

Robson was critical of the current undifferentiated approach to Innovation Policy. He pointed out that whilst 75% of Australia's employment is located in Service Industries that Service only constitutes 1% of our exports. In Australia less than 1% of SME are involved with Universities compared with 33% in Finland. He stressed that the current Government policy has only a low appreciation of the potential role for Universities, especially with respect to the Social Sciences. An example is in how we address *Ageing*, with an emphasis on pharmaceutical rather than lifestyle solutions. He suggested that Universities' preoccupation with patents and commercialization may have accentuated these gaps. Universities can make great contributions through problem solving as well as new products. Universities' greatest product is their graduates who can think, solve problems and are excited by challenges. The key value is expertise and a mode of thinking.

Apart from lack of funding of infrastructure, Robson identified our inability to attract local students to postgraduate study as a critical and growing problem. With huge changes occurring in many other countries, Australia is vulnerable to being left behind.

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